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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE OF CHARLES EASTWICK SMITH.

BY THOMAS MEEHAN.

Appointed to prepare a memoir of our late fellow-member, Charles E. Smith, the author feels strongly a difficulty he has experienced on similar occasions. The members of the Academy meet for mutual improvement and study. The various subjects in which they take interest become the chief topics of conversation. They know little of the outside life of one another. A tree is to be known only by its fruit. As it grows through successive years it appears much like other trees, and no note is taken of the incidents of its growth; but when the harvest time arrives, and all are in praise of the bountiful crop, carrying pleasure and profit around it in every direction, a natural desire arises to know more of the details of such a happy career,—a desire that can only be satisfied by recalling circumstances imperfectly remembered, or that have but little bearing on the character we would illustrate.

So when the subject of this memoir passed away few of his associates could aid the author. All knew that he was one of Philadelphia's most prominent citizens; that he had been at the head of some of its great business bodies; that he had been largely concerned with the city's good name and progress; that he had long been a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, especially interested in botany and kindred subjects, a liberal contributor through the greater part of his life to its building funds, its collections and general progress, and that on his death it was found that he had generously provided for its future out of his rich estate. But few knew more than all knew. Indeed, but for aid from Dr. Edward J. Nolan and Dr. Thomas C. Porter the author would have been left solely to his own recollections and the replies to letters of inquiry sent to friends of our departed associate for material for his task.

His full name was Charles Eastwick Smith—Eastwick being the maiden name of his grandmother. He was the second of that name in the family, the first dying before he was born. His

Philadelphia ancestors were among the original party with William Penn and, like the founder of the city, strong believers in the doctrines of the Society of Friends. Little can be learned of his early life. He was born November 1, 1820, and seems to have had especial care and oversight from his mother, to whom he was deeply devoted through life, and by whose side in Laurel Hill Cemetery he was placed when his own time of rest arrived. He probably received his rudimentary education in Philadelphia, and at the age of fifteen was sent to the boarding-school of Westtown, near this city. It was here, as he related to his friend Dr. Porter, that he acquired his fondness for botany, through the influence of one of the instructors. He remained here three years, when he became attached to an engineer corps, engaged to survey for a railroad from Blossburg to Corning, in New York. He became the superintendent of the railroad, and later of the Bloomsburg coal mines, though he had scarcely attained his majority. He returned to Philadelphia in 1842, and established the Fairmount Rolling Mill. This was not a financial success, from the fact, as he believed, that coöperation throughout the whole iron trade was needed to place the industry on a firm footing. He sold it out in 1846.

About this period an event occurred that had a material influence on his future life. In 1844 a fierce antagonism to Roman Catholicism arose. A number of churches were burned. The Mayor called on all able-bodied citizens to arm in defense of law and order. The Quaker youth went out with a cane, but in the excitement of the riot some one put a musket in his hands, and he patrolled the streets with it for seven nights. For this violation of the principle of non-resistance he was called on to express regret, and to give a promise of strict conformity to the rule thereafter. Believing himself harshly treated, he refused to do so and was expelled from the Society. He at once dropped the garb and language of the Friends and associated with other bodies. He never married, and if the event detailed had aught to do with the fact, the secret was faithfully kept to the last.

For a short time subsequent to 1846 he became manager of the Rensselaer Iron Works, at Troy, N. Y., in which railroad iron was being manufactured. He returned to Philadelphia in 1849, to inaugurate a convention of iron men. The poverty of the constituency forced the association to be content with inferior printing

and paper for its report. In a letter to a friend he says: "Mr. Colville told me we must go over the State and get the interest of every iron-maker. I asked him for money to pay my expenses. He said I must beg it, as he had none. 'You must ask for contributions as you go along.' I started with \$5. Sometimes I got a wagon, sometimes a horse ride, sometimes on foot—sometimes I got fifty cents. In one case I got \$10. I saw them all, came back with between \$200 and \$300, and the American Iron and Steel Association became a flourishing body.' He traveled 2,500 miles on this mission.

There seems nothing on record as to his occupation for the succeeding ten years, but in a letter to a friend he remarks that he attended faithfully to his office work during the day and employed his evenings in studying and classifying the plants collected on Sunday.

In 1861 he was elected to the presidency of the Reading Railroad Company. From a comparatively local and almost bankrupt organization, he raised it to one of broad interest and a good dividend-paying concern—so profitable that in the trying times of the beginning of the civil war his company loaned the Government two millions and a half of dollars. In 1869 it stood in prosperity second to none in the country.

His health broke down. His medical adviser urged his resignation and suggested several things he might do. At length the physician, in a peculiar way, remarked that he had "better go to grass." The joke had a good effect. He took the advice literally, resigned, and turned to botany for consolation. He still retained his position on the Board of Directors. On the 18th of April, 1869, he sailed on the "Scotia" for an extended tour of Europe, during which botanical study was his chief recreation, although he deeply enjoyed all that would interest a broad-minded man of affairs. He returned on the 15th of September, 1870.

Some years later he discovered that the great railroad company that had been the pride of his life, was bankrupt under the management of his successor in the presidency. The effect on his health was seriously depressing. By night, as by day, the railroad was ever in his mind. While greatly troubled by insomnia, he was requested by the Secretary of the Academy to read the proof-sheets of a botanical paper in course of publication. To his

surprise he found that the mental application required for proof-reading was an excellent remedy for his sleeplessness. The application required for the task drove out thoughts of the railroad's disaster. He begged for more, both from the Academy and from friends, and the greater part of his subsequent life was devoted, as one of the best means for preserving health, to his favorite occupation of proof-reading.

Though not courting favors, he was highly esteemed by his fellow-citizens. For two successive years, 1877 and 1878, he was elected president of the Union League—one of the most enviable of Philadelphia's social positions.

His eminently practical character has been well illustrated by the reference to his journey through the State in the interests of the iron men, and by the details of his railroad affairs. He carried this quality into all his transactions. His close friend, Prof. T. C. Porter, relates that on a trip with him, Aubrey H. Smith and Dr. Joseph Leidy, in July and August, 1865, to Lake Superior, they were much amused by his practical test of the truth of the Abbé Huc's statement that cow "cake" was better for kindling, but that horse "apples" were better for holding heat in a fire. The result proved the correctness of Abbé Huc's assertion. Dr. Porter further notes, as illustrative of the tendency to draw valuable conclusions from little things, that one of the party, having placed over the fire a branch of a spruce tree to aid in extinguishing it, Smith noted how the turpentine oozed from the twigs, flashed into a blaze and sent up as incense a cloud of fragrant white smoke.

With all his love of facts, he was not devoid of sentiment. His private correspondence discloses an active interest in the good of others of which the world will never know. Few have succeeded so well in preventing the left hand from knowing what the right hand was doing. His selection of a burial place in Laurel Hill Cemetery for his mother, on a spot that commanded the most delightful views of the Schuylkill and the surroundings, is a striking testimony to his depth of sentiment.

We have already seen how he was early brought into a love for botany at the boarding-school. He was elected a member of the Academy in 1851, and served in some of the administrative offices until his death. He was appointed on the Publication Committee

in 1892, in which position he rendered especially valuable service. He served on the Finance Committee from December, 1890, and was one of the Council from May, 1891. At the time of his death he was, and had been for a number of years, Vice-Director of the Botanical Section.

His influence on American botany, and on American science generally, was exerted in such a quiet way that its full importance will never be appreciated. His critical mind led him to prefer difficult subjects; hence carices, grasses and rushes had especial charms for him. He could readily see what others failed to observe, and he became an authority on these subjects. While in the midst of his heavy labors in reconstructing the railroad company, he was in active correspondence with Boott, Olney, Engelmann and other specialists in the study of these difficult genera. He rather prided himself on going over oft-trodden ground and noting what others failed to see. By his persistency with Dr. Gray he finally induced this great botanist to recognize two new species from oft-explored localities in New Jersey, which he named *Scirpus Smithii* and *Lobelia Canbyi*, and this after he had failed to satisfy Boott and Olney of the distinctness of the forms. In explanation of his persistency he tells a friend, "When there seems to be reason for my sentiments, I must express them or die." In a letter to a friend, dated October 15, 1867, he remarks, "At Moosehead Lake I also got *Graphephorum melicoides* and *Aspidium fragrans*, heretofore only known as Western plants. It is a comfort to penetrate the hub of the universe and make the natives acquainted with their own plants. One feels good—that is to say, much like a missionary."

Apart from the beneficent influence the concentration required by good proof-reading had in counteracting insomnia, it was through his chosen work as proof-reader that he has left his impress, especially on botanical literature. He begged his friends, as a privilege, to permit him to read proofs for them. In the course of such work the contributions of his botanical friends underwent his critical scrutiny; and the authors received the benefit of his watchful care. The corrections would often be clothed in dry humor. He once wrote to Dr. Gray on the issuance of a new edition of his *Manual*, "Have you observed from Gray's *Manual* that *Solidago altissima* grows only two to seven inches

high?" The remarkable accuracy that marks the botanical labors of the last quarter of a century is in a great measure due to the impulse given to extra care by Charles E. Smith. The last edition of Leidy's *Elementary Treatise on Human Anatomy*, although carefully read by the author, would have described a certain process of the brain as the "Hippopotamus"—instead of the Hippocampus—minor, had it not been for Smith's supervision. It is not only in the superior accuracy of the literature of botany and allied studies that science is indebted to our friend. He was ever ready with encouragement for all botanical enterprises, and especially in the case of younger students. He took an especially warm interest in the establishment of the Ladies' Botanical Club of Syracuse, N. Y., aiding the society by advice and material.

The ablest leaders relied on his judgment. Before the appearance of one of the editions of his *Manual*, Dr. Gray proposed extending the area covered by it. The question was left to Mr. Smith, who decided adversely. He believed in thorough work, and held that this was favored by concentration rather than diffusion of effort. In this spirit he commenced a herbarium of the plants growing within fifteen miles of Philadelphia. This collection he bequeathed to the Academy, and it is regarded as a masterpiece of accurate labor. Every locality is exactly noted, and in every case the existence of the plant on the spot was verified by a personal examination, its identity being carefully ascertained.

The Recording Secretary of the Academy, whose official relations brought him into intimate communication with Mr. Smith, remarks in reply to a note of inquiry:

"Although he was not a frequent visitor to the Academy, he impressed me in the early years of his connection with it as a man of singular directness and personal force. A tone of command and authority, resonant voice, clear enunciation, and erect bearing conveyed the idea of perfect mental poise and a habit of rather directing than of conferring with his associates—but all this without a suspicion of arrogance or superciliousness."

He died on Sunday, the 15th of April, 1900, in the eightieth year of his age. The Academy, proud of its contributors to the advancement of knowledge among mankind, places with them in grateful remembrance the name of Charles Eastwick Smith.